**Paper Title**: Linking Children to Non Formal Education
**Presenter**: Leena Devi Boodhoo (Mauritius).
halley@intnet.mu

**Skills Development.**
**Skills Development for National Development**

## Background of Mauritius

The Republic of Mauritius includes the Indian Ocean islands of Rodrigues, St Brandon and Agalega. We are in the Eastern coast of the Malagasy Republic. The islands' multiracial population consists of descendants of French, African, Indian, Chinese and British immigrants.

Mauritius was granted independence in 1968 and became a Republic in 1992. It is a member of the Commonwealth Nations, the Afro-Malagasy-Mauritian common organizations, and the organisation of African Unity, and has a special arrangement with the European Union under the Lomé Convention.

## Background of Education and dropout rates.

Every year, some 7000 children of the age of 12 drop out of the Primary School system in Mauritius after having failed at their Terminal Certificate of Primary Education twice. They become school drop outs. The official initial age for employment being 15 years, many of the dropouts will roam the streets illiterate, innumerate and barely able to fend for themselves. The formal school system consisting mostly of Government schools would presently absorb annually about a 1000 of them, the rest are left to themselves. Restricted in number, these schools do not serve many 'high risks' regions.

Fortunately, there are some Non-Governmental Organizations which attempt to offer some form of alternative education to many of these young people. This education may be either of a general, pre-vocational or vocational nature. In spite of their effort, still the majority of primary school dropouts are left unattended. There is a pressing need to increase educational provisions in this area both quantitatively and qualitatively.

One of the Non-Governmental organizations which is offering a 'second chance' to a few of them who have been dropped off the formal system of education is Halley Movement. Internet Child Safety Foundation is the subsidiary organ of Halley Movement.

## Internet Child Safety Foundation

Internet Child Safety Foundation is a child and family oriented NGO with a special focus on ICT. This organization runs various programs and these include:

- Advocacy

- Research

- Education

- Counseling, and

- Production of materials

## Research Study

We have carried out a research study with the financial support of UNICEF to look into causes of primary school failures. The objectives of the study were the following:

- Investigate into the factors associated with failure at CPE (Certificate of Primary Education) and to suggest remedial measures.
- To examine the influence of socio-economic status on academic performance.
- To document the background characteristics of school dropouts and parents and their perceptions of issues related to the study, so as to provide an understanding of the local conditions.

## Findings of the study

- The dropouts suffer from lack of parental control and support
- They come from low socio-economic status families
- The policy of automatic promotion in primary schools is worth considering.
- CPE curriculum is too overloaded.

## Community Involvement and UNICEF

We conducted a training programme for a group of teachers who would embark on the project of providing non formal education to the young school dropouts. The training was carried out again with financial support from UNICEF.

The community, including religious and social leaders were encouraged to join in the project and identify potential dropouts who would be the participants of the dropouts programme.

## The need for a Non Formal Curriculum

A curriculum is always designed and developed to respond to the needs and characteristics of a clientele. It does not exist in a vacuum. It has furthermore to take into consideration the characteristics of the educational, family and community environment of the learner and the expectations and aspirations of the country. An insight into these needs and characteristics is essential if one is to understand the pertinence and appropriateness of the curricular proposals.

The learners for whom this curriculum is proposed are between 12 to 15/16 years old. They fall into the age group of young adolescents who are undergoing rapid physical growth and are witnessing the onset

of puberty. This is also a stage of rapid emotional, social and moral development. The adolescents, divided between the world of childhood and adulthood, may often feel a t a loss and the need for adult care, love, comfort, understanding and advice is high.

These adolescents are leaving school with an academic education ranging from total ignorance to being barely literate or numerate. They as well run the risk of soon dropping back into illiteracy and innumeracy. A majority of them have classified themselves as 'failures' and have low self esteem regarding scholastic achievement. They have lost their self confidence, suffer from learned helplessness and their higher abilities such as problem solving or creativity, have remained unattended. Their social skills are few and their disposition may range between timidity, withdrawal, inability to maintain disciplined behavior to frequent violent behavior.

In a hard world like this, there are fortunately a few NGOs providing basic education to out of school adolescents. They tend to situate their centres inside the locality they serve. The main reason is to motivate a greater number of school dropouts to enroll and to encourage interaction between the family, community and the educational centres. All these organizations work towards improving the life chances of those who are neglected.

For the purpose of this paper, I am going to concentrate on the program, initiated by our organization and which aims at providing literacy and computer courses to marginalized children in Mauritius. This program is called 'Basic Education To Adolescents'-BETA program.

## BETA Program

The Basic Education To Adolescent (BETA) Program is a program which aims at providing functional literacy, numeracy and computer courses to primary schools dropouts. This program started as from May, 1998. Initially the program covers one class of some thirty (30) learners of six villages of the south of the island of Mauritius. These learners after failing the Primary terminal Examinations for two times have been pushed out of the school system.

The BETA Program represents a second chance for these marginalized youths to learn to read, write and acquire some essential skills which could be useful in their life. The curriculum has been designed in such a way as to include six different learning areas.

## The Curriculum

The curriculum therefore has been planned by educators from the technical team of Halley Movement and Internet Child Safety Foundation keeping in mind the development pace of the targeted learners. This team has taken into account the physical resources, work programs, assessment criteria and extra – mural programs.

**Objectives of BETA (Basic Education To Adolescents)**

I would like to give you the objectives of the program before enlisting the different learning areas.

The overall objectives of the BETA Program are:

- To combat exclusion and to facilitate social integration
- To enable everyone to participate fully in the socio-economic life of the country
- To empower young people for critical thinking and problem solving

**The learning Areas**

There are six different learning areas:

Communication, literacy and language learning

People interact with the world and each other through language. The more we are able to communicate, the better we are able to understand each other. Improved communication can only lead to a society free of intolerance, misunderstanding and prejudice.

Numeracy & Mathematics

Numeracy and Mathematics is a way of understanding the world. Mathematics encourages logical thinking, problem solving and teaches people analytical skills that will allow them to make critical decisions. This learning area will equip learners to cope with a rapidly changing technological environment.

Natural Sciences

In order to manage the resources of the world effectively, people need to understand the universe-both natural and created by people. This learning area will equip our learners with the ability to understand our natural resources and to manage them effectively.

Arts and Culture

Culture and the Arts are important areas of life. Through developing creativity and exploring the diverse cultures that exist, the spiritual, intellectual and emotional aspects of our personalities will be promoted. By the way, Mauritius being a multi cultural country, our learners need a better exploration of the various cultures.

Computer Literacy

In actuality, computers, like any other discipline inspire different level of expertise. On the least specialized level, computer literacy involves knowing, how to turn on a computer, start and stop simple application programs, and save and print information.

Life Orientation

We are actually living in a rapidly changing society. Mauritius has turned from an agricultural society to an industrial one. To cope with everyday challenges, learners need to develop life skills. Life orientation includes the building of self esteem, survival skills and a healthy life style.

## Achievements of the program

The BETA Program is off to a good start. Learners are enthusiastic and are learning the basic information according to the learning areas. The volunteer instructors of the learning program are keen to contribute and are conscious to improve their skills. Through volunteer service, the Halley Movement is effectively guiding the Mauritian children to foster a sense of citizenship and belongings to the society.

These children are being taught in a non formal manner. These rural learners are able to catch up what they have missed during their formal year in schools. As they have failed their terminal exams at the age of 12 and are no more allowed to pursue with formal education, this initiative is providing them with a second chance to learning.

## Challenges faced by the NGO

- In house training for educators
- Motivation of the learners' parents
- Funding

At the start of the of the BETA program, our NGO benefitted from UNICEF support to train the educators. Now we are turning to the corporate sector to assist us for this training component.

The six regions from where the BETA learners come are rural ones. Parents quite often go to work in the fields together with those children that are not attending formal schools. It becomes quite difficult for us to stress on the fact that these children need to go for the courses that are provided by the NGO. Several parents meetings are scheduled in order to encourage parents to buy in this education concept.

Funding, of course remains the most challenging constraint or our NGO. We need support to run the program. Luckily some well wishers do cater for this need. But the support comes as a one off donation and our NGO has to look for funding every time.